CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre This Week

Bleak House-Bijou 4/20/53. Sol Hurok presents Emlyn Williams' dramatic reading of Charles Dickens classic. Program will alternate with Dickens' readings presented last year,starting 4/22/53. Limited run of 3 weeks.

The Pink Elephant- Playhouse 4/22/53. Eugene Paul,William ' Kaufman and Blair Wallisher present new comedy by John G Fuller about the tribulations of a Republican politician's ghost writer with some "leftists." Harry Ellerbe directed cast headed by Steve Allen, Jean Casto, Howard Smith and Joel Wesley.

Theatre Guild 35th Anniversary Exhibit opens 4/21/53 at organization's headquarters 23 W 53 for 3 weeks. Open Mon to Fri from 2 to 5 PM with stars alternating as hosts daily. Photographs,miniature stage settings,programs and other memorabilia will be exhibited.

Current Theatre Reviews

A Date With April-Royale 4/15/53. Murderous is the best way to describe the unanimous panning George Batson's new comedy received from the NY daily press. None blamed Constance Bennett making her Broadway debut, nor the cast headed by Evelyn Varden,Edmon Ryan and Marjorie Peterson. Major fault was pure dullness of script which concerns triangle of composer-pianist,novelist and movie idol. Most agreed that because author gave Bennett little chance to act, Evelyn Varden garnered what few laughs were available. Sheer persistence,unwavering faith or plain downright stubborness only way Funke,Times,could explain opening. Kerr,Herald Tribune,noted that major misunderstanding of evening is that author thinks he has written a comedy. Chapman,News,is convinced that anyone with a fair aptitude for dialog could write a thing like this with one arm tied behind his back,-and the author did. Evening seemed like long dull weekend at summer resort,commented Coleman,Mirror.Worst play of season award given by Watts,Post, who suggests to Bennett that she can still claim she hasn't been in a Broadway play. Dreary and ostentatious effort should have continued its road tour and never tried NY,advises McClain,Journal American. Whatever youmay think of what happens on stage, notes Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun,Bennett magnetism projects,mystifies and tantalizes.But her play,he admits,unfortunately splashes thin as farce material masquerades as fairly high comedy. Star should have simply waited a little longer for her first NY try,sums up Sheaffer,Eagle.

Out of Town Tryout

Commercial,though perhaps not artistic,success predicted by trade paper reporters for Men of Distinction, Richard Condon's new comedy produced by Chandler Cowles and Martin Gabel which debuted in Philadelphia prior to NY opening April 30.Based on the recent Jelke case,show is strong with first rate cast headed by Robert Preston and David Burns. Orodenker,Billboard and Waters,Variety, agreed first act needs fixing.

London Report

Forsaking the London theatre for a few days Atkinson,Times,explored the Thames bankside where Shakespeare lived and worked 350 years ago. Though scant theatre activity is in evidence, the original sites of the famed Bear Gardens,Rose Theatre are marked by tablets. Southwark borough will present a festival of 10 Shakespeare plays during the Coronation period.

' Off Broadway '

Current Stages' The Plough and the Stars moves to Cherry Lane April 16 for 3 month run of O'Casey play...Lee Shubert donated $5000 to Minor Latham Drama Workshop at Barnard College... The Year Round, all Negro musical by Mervyn Nelson presented by Sidney Bernstein at Harlem Musical Theatre, 11 West 125th St for 3 weeks starting April 21...Blind members of the Lighthouse Players will produce William McCleery's Good Housekeeping at 11 E 56 April 24-26...Key to the Future, drama depicting growth of Israel presented by 4 companies at 9 Israel Independence Day celebrations April 20, casts include Kim Hunter, Mercedes McCambridge, Sam Jaffe... Touring Players, Inc, closed Which Way Is Home after 2 weeks at Theatre de Lys.

Originals Only musical Surprise Package is a feeble attempt agreed Jess, Variety, and Rice, Post. But several performers were praised. Post drama editor thought 3 items may make stop at 100 Seventh Ave S. worthwhile inspite of hackneyed book. Score of Frances Ziffer, Hortense Belson and Hardy Weider, the vitality of George Kraeer's playing and the rousing baritone voice of Larry Mitchell.

Blackfriars Guild re-opening of Angelic Doctor by Rev. Brendan Larnen recommended by Shanley, Times, and Rice, Post. Times man found it an intelligent and refreshing approach to a cloistered subject. Presenting story of Thomas Aquinas is a fine nonsectarian service of group, critic noted.

Champagne Theatre at Hotel Sutton, 330 E 56, presentation of Jean Adra's 3d Dimensions'53 is a tolerable musical revue, okays Rice, Post. If off broadway fan goes in an agreeable fram of mind and with tolerance in his heart, he will see a pleasant revue. Faith Dane 's comedy talent, Keith Lawrence's singing ability and Norman Martin's tune 'I've Got Good News" were highlighted...Simone, play by George Morris presented by Players' Company at Amato Theatre, panned by Rice, Post, as confusing fantasy not worth doing.

' Theatre Books '

Joseph Wood Krutch volume of drama criticism "Modernism in the Modern Theatre" published later this season by Cornell University Press...Viking to publish Arthur Miller's The Crucible...Eva Le Gallienne's autobiorgarphy " With A Quiet Heart" published by Viking...Random House to publish 2 endings for William Inge's "Picnic" ...Houghton-Mifflin will publish Ruth Chatterton's second book "The Betrayers" in September.."1953 Blueprint for Summer Theatres Supplement" available from ANTA. It has special articles, rules, data on theatres, and clips of Variety reviews of 1952 tryouts.

"Prince of Players", Eleanor Ruggles biography of Edwin Booth published by Norton highly recommended by Down, Variety, Sheaffer, Eagle, Coleman, Mirror and Burr, Playbill.

' Theatre Records '

Hazel Flagg original cast album is only for those who saw the musical and want disc for record, comments Billboard ...Wonderful Town original cast album rated perfect by Hobe, Variety, for those who have or haven't not seen Rosiland Russell hit. Score seems more versatile and lyrics more intelligible at home with repeated listenings, he raved.

' Theatre Film Notes '

Time of the Cuckoo film rights bought by Ilya Lopert...John Brown's Body to be filmed by Paul Gregory and Charles Laughton...Columbia dropped present plans to film Pal Joey starring Mae West... Hazel Flagg may be filmed with original NY cast via 3 D processes by Jule Styne, Charles Feldman and David Selznick. Hyams, Herald Tribune reports that union okay must be sought first...Richard Rodgers denies possible 3 D version of Oklahoma made by Mike Todd, both board members of newly formed Magna Theatre Corporation. Lee Shubert is also on board of company.

' Green Room Department '

NY CRITICS CIRCLE AWARDS...Picnic, Wonderful Town and Love of Four Colonels easily won NY Critics Circle Award voting at Algonquin Hotel. Picnic picked as best American play of year by 11, runner ups being The Crucible with 4 votes, and Camino Real voted for by Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, and Keating, Cue. Climate of Eden voted for by Chapman, News. Wonderful Town won 20 votes on first and only ballot, with Lawrence Perry, NANA, holding out for Hazel Flagg. for the best new musical citation. Love of Four Colonels picked in best new foreign play field by 13 ballots. 8 favored Dial M for Murder. 8 critics were absent. ...Special citation for John Brown's Body suggested by Brown, Saturday Review was turned down. As was suggestion of Coleman, Mirror, that drama critics meet regularly with film and music critics for meetings akin to "Drama Desk."

REVIVAL MYSTERY...Percentages always against the success of an old play in a new form, advises Morehouse, WT&S. This fact does not appear to discourage producers of revivals, even though only 1 in 10 pay off. But theatre is and always has been, critic adds, a business in which sublime optimism is a necessity...What is distracting about light attendance at On Borrowed Time and Misalliance to Kerr, Herald Tribune, is that a pleasure seeking audience is cheating itself of the precise pleasure it claims to be looking for. The playgoer who passes up Misalliance, the reviewer firmly believes, deserves to be trapped in the dullest show in town, and to be boiled in hamfat the next time he complains about the season.

COLUMN TIPS...9 to ~~192~~ 12 shows can run through the summer, predicts Variety. 9 sure things are Dial M For Murder, 5th Season, Picnic, Seven Year Itch, King and I, Wish You Were Here, Wonderful Town...Maddest rumor of year heard by Kilgallen who was told that Ex King Farouk wants to back Truman Capote's next play... Wonderful Town selling tickets for New Year's Eve reports Sobol...TV show based on life and exploits of Shuberts being planned by a major talent agency whispers Stahl, TV Guide...Insurance premiums for play title stealing jumped to 3 times previous rates, reports Farrell, WT&S.

NEW TYPE ADS...Theatre can be saved, and drama critics eliminated, if it follows the advertising practices of the film industry. Latter doesn't wait for audience to find a certain film, Chapman, News, details as his plan to save the theatre, instead the movie finds its public-hints it, tracks it down and clubs it into submission. Picnic might be advertised like this, critic, suggests: "See the hottest kiss in town! Hear it! The Lovers pant in a frenzied embrace! etc."

HIGHLIGHTS OF EMPIRE...ANTA plans for May 24 "Highlights of the Empire", which will be presented instead of the usual "ANTA Album" are being completed. Scenes from famous shows in Empire Theatre's history with many of the original performers will be presented! Acceptances have already been received from Judith Anderson, Howard Lindsay, Shirley Booth, Ruth Chatterton, Ina Claire, Basil Rathbone and others.

STEIN FANS... 4 letters in Times Drama Mailbag highly recommended the Gertrude Stein sequence "Brewsie and Willie" in Touring Players, Inc. production of Which Way is Home? Carl Van Vechten, Jessie Royce Landis and Norris Houghton filed notes.

' NYC Theatre News Round Up '

Pal Joey, Room Service, On Borrowed Time closed...Love of 4 Colonels moved to Broadhurst...Presentation of NY Drama Critics Circle Awards made at Theatre Guild April 20...Gertrude Lawrence Exhibit at Musuem of City of NY extended to Aug 30... The Children's Hour giving Sunday matinee and evening performances.

' Critics Choice of Current Shows '

Critics Choice summarizes the views of NYC daily,weekly, trade journal and broadcaster critics on current Broadway shows under headings "Raves," "Mixed" and "Cons." "Pros" in chart refer to reviews where critic recommends event for an entertaining or stimulating evening in the theatre, not if he judged it a commercial success. Ratings of reviews from NYC dailies,weekly magazines,and trade journals and broadcasters appear in alternate weeks. THIS WEEK WEEKLIES.

RAVES:	Beatrice Lillie	7 pro	10/2/52	Crucible-	6 pro	Con-	Time 1/22/53
	Dial M For Murder	7 pro	10/29/52	The King &I	6 pro	Con-	Nation 3/2/53
	Misalliance	7 pro	2/18/53	Guys & Dolls	6 pro	Con-	Nation 11/24/50
	Moon is Blue	7 pro	3/8/51	Mid Summer	6 pro	Con	N.Yorker 1/21/53
	Porgy & Bess	7 pro	3/9/53	Picnic	6 pro	Con-	Time 2/19/53
	Wonderful Town	7 pro	2/25/53	7 Year Itch	6 pro	Con-	Time 11/20/52
	Time of Cuckoo	6 Pro	Con Time 10/15/52	South Pacfic	6 pro	Con-	Time 4/7/49
				My 3 Angels	6 pro	Con-	Cue 3/11/53

MIXED:

Time Out For Ginger	5 Pro-Con-	Cue,New Yorker	11/26/52
Love of 4 Colonels	5 Pro-Con-	New Yorker,Nation	1/15/53
Children's Hour	4 Pro-Con-	Cue, Nation,New Republic	12/18/52
Hazel Flagg	4 Pro-Con-	Cue, Nation, New Republic.	2/11/53

CONS:

Fifth Season	3 Pro-Con-	Time,Newsweek,Nation, New Republic 1/23/53
Camino Real	3 Pro-Con-	Time,Newsweek.None Yet: Nation,New Republic
Wish You Were Here	No Pros-7 Cons.	

' Last Words by TMK '

Shirley Booth, Time of the Cuckoo,who has recently been "discovered"by Hollywood,didn't receive any awards at "Drama Desk" luncheon in her honor. This is because the NY theatre reporters and editors group grants no awards to anybody for anything. Except for the dismal fact that she quits Time of the Cuckoo May 30 for a 2 month vacation prior to new stage and film chores,the luncheon resulted in scant news.Actress did ask critics never to be lenient,but to always tell her when she does anything wrong. Star really shouldn't worry much about this, for the NY critics aren't shy with actresses , especially movie actresses.

Everybody,but everybody,receives program credit in entertaining Evening With Beatrice Lillie except the bass fiddle aide of Eadie & Rack. So what is his name?

"Amen" is only possible comment to be added to Kerr,Herald Tribune complaint over playgoers failure to support On Borrowed Time. But if by some freak A Date With April survives,then theatre people should have their values re-examined by their psychitrists.

Wonderful Town original cast album disc(Decca) is in many ways better than the show itself. Score by Leonard Bernstein,divorced from the splendor of the star,sets and lights,is probably one of the most versatile ever written for a Broadway musical. Tunes range from an original Irish folk song, a lively corga, take offs on jazz and novelty songs,and many more. While Betty Compden -Adolph Green Lyrics are poetic-satiric masterpieces which gain on closer listening. "What a Waste" and "Pass the Football" are humorous editorials in song. No one in cast has a great voice,but in such company this is of minor importance.